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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 001844

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH PUBLICLY HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNS

REF: A. ANKARA 5599

[B](#). 04 ISTANBUL 843

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (U) Summary: Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew raised publicly October 20 his inability to use his ecumenical title in Turkey and the continued lack of dialogue with the Turkish government on such key issues as reopening Halki Seminary. Turkish press gave wide coverage to the remarks, which were delivered at a meeting between the Patriarchate and European People's parties. In response, AKP Deputy Chair Saban Disli claimed his party's government was open to dialogue and that the Prime Minister would respond favorably to any request for an appointment. Disli also stressed the government's desire to open Halki, but rejected use of the ecumenical title, arguing that under the Lausanne Treaty the Patriarch is simply leader of Turkey's minority Orthodox population. End Summary.

[2](#). (U) Challenging the Status Quo: Throughout the October 20 meeting, many EU participants used the "Ecumenical" title, while Hans-Gert Pottering, leader of the Christian Democratic group in the European Parliament, warned that "islamophobia" (note: a term used by PM Erdogan at the September Meeting of Civilizations in Hatay) would increase if Halki Seminary were not reopened.

[3](#). (C) Comment: The exchange between Disli and Bartholomew at the meeting may be the closest thing to dialog that has occurred since a January 2004 meeting between the Patriarchate and a delegation from an Ankara-based inter-ministerial commission (ref B). Whether emboldened by October 3 to force the issue, or believing there was simply nothing to lose, Bartholomew used language that was stronger than usual for his Istanbul (as opposed to European) audience, and placed the ecumenical status issue among his chief concerns. While Lausanne is often cited as precluding use of the ecumenical title, it in fact makes no reference to the issue. Perhaps coincidentally, another event may soon generate similar "E Word" headlines: the November 7-9 Appeal of Conscience conference, co-sponsored by the Patriarchate to promote interfaith dialogue, at which the Charge is expected to deliver greetings (ref A).
JONES